

# Tahfiz Students' Interest and Awareness of Career Opportunities in the TVET Sector: A Gender Comparison

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30880/ritvet.2024.04.02.012>

## Article Info

Received: 3 February 2024

Accepted: 22 December 2024

Available online: 30 December 2024

## Keywords

TVET, Gender sensitive, Awareness,  
Interest, Tahfiz

## Abstract

The study examines the gender disparity in technical and vocational abilities among students attending Tahfiz schools, which mainly emphasize Islamic and Quranic teachings. The purpose of the study is to determine how interested and informed male and female Tahfiz students are of employment prospects. With 144 respondents, this study employs a quantitative survey approach. It finds that Tahfiz students generally felt highly interested in and informed of employment prospects. The study used comparative analysis, which enables comparison of its results with those of other studies. Importantly, there were no apparent gender variations in awareness or interest. According to the study, these results ought to direct the creation of a fair mix of inclusive educational and career programs in TVET, taking into account the many interests of Tahfiz students, thereby promoting the nation's professionalism and economic growth

## 1. Introduction

The importance of TVET in the modernization journey cannot be overstated (Clement et al., 2018). While the Tahfiz education system emphasizes Quranic memorisation, there needs to be a uniform curriculum and teacher support to ensure the integration of TVET (Yakim, 2020). Recognizing the economic significance, governments invest in TVET for skilled human capital and equal employment opportunities (Yamada & Otchia, 2020). Despite the recent acknowledgment of TVET integration in various educational settings, including religious institutions like Tahfiz schools (Ibrahim & Hamzah, 2021), the implementation and awareness within Tahfiz student populations still need to be explored. This study aims to bridge the gap by examining the awareness and implementation of TVET among Tahfiz students, focusing on their knowledge, perceptions, and capacity to integrate TVET into their curriculum. Despite existing literature on the benefits of TVET, there is limited research on its integration into non-traditional educational environments like Tahfiz schools (Ibrahim & Hamzah, 2021). This study strives to contribute valuable insights into Tahfiz students' awareness of TVET across genders, potentially enhancing their employability and socioeconomic status and being gender sensitive. Additionally, it addresses the absence of information regarding students' knowledge and perceptions, offering valuable perspectives for successful TVET integration in Tahfiz schools.

This research investigates the extent of interest in technical and vocational education while assessing the awareness among Tahfiz students regarding career opportunities in the TVET sector. The primary emphasis is gauging the interest levels of Tahfiz students in TVET. Furthermore, the study will encompass a survey to ascertain the awareness among Tahfiz students regarding the various career prospects available within TVET. Next, the study explores the difference in interest between male and female Tahfiz students towards TVET and analyses the difference in awareness of career opportunities among genders. To achieve the study's objective,

several research questions must be resolved so that the survey stays within the study's original goal. The research questions to be resolved are: What is the level of interest of Tahfiz students in the field of TVET? What is the Tahfiz students' awareness of career opportunities in TVET? Is there a difference in male and female Tahfiz students' interest in career opportunities in the TVET field? Is there a difference in the level of interest of male and female Tahfiz students towards TVET?

### 1.1 Interest

Student interest plays a vital role in education, influencing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. Understanding the nature of student interest and its underlying factors can help in teaching and curriculum design. Student interest refers to an individual's attraction, curiosity or personal investment in a particular subject, topic or activity in an educational context. It includes an intrinsic desire to engage, explore and learn about a particular knowledge or skill area.

Student interest reflects the harmony between students' priorities, values, and goals and the available content or tasks (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Students' pre-existing knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and personal goals play a significant role in influencing their interest in a particular subject. Additionally, students' perceived competence and the value they attach to a specific domain can also contribute to shaping their interests (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Introducing optional components linked to real-world applications into the curriculum, as exemplified in the field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), has the potential to enhance student interest. Creating opportunities for exploration, hands-on experiences, and projects aligned with student interests can cultivate a heightened sense of interest and engagement, as Harackiewicz et al. (2008) suggested.

Student interest is the main factor in choosing a career in TVET. Students who are interested in a particular field are more likely to pursue it as a career and be more likely to be successful in that field (Harackiewicz, 2012). Therefore, student interest is critical in educational settings, influencing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. By understanding the definition of interest and considering the situational, personal, and task-related factors that influence interest, educators can create environments that support and nurture student interest, leading to enhanced learning experiences and outcomes.

### 1.2 Awareness in the field of TVET

Each person ought to possess the capacity to comprehend and perceive events in their surroundings, a state commonly referred to as consciousness. On the other hand, awareness can be defined as a comprehension of occurrences in our immediate environment. According to Schmidt (2002), the term consciousness has become less prevalent and is employed in an increasingly contradictory manner. In contrast, Gafoor (2012) defines awareness as the state or ability to perceive, feel, or acknowledge objects or patterns. In alignment with the earlier perspectives, consciousness can be elucidated as a phenomenon inherent in human experiences, encompassing aspects like socialization, learning, and self-understanding.

In this study, awareness of career opportunities in the field of TVET is essential for individuals considering a vocational path and for the overall growth of the skilled workforce (Ismail & Abidin, 2014). This effort to increase awareness involves various strategies, from effective promotion and marketing of TVET programs to establishing solid partnerships with the industry. Collaboration with industry facilitates curriculum development aligned with industry needs, making graduates more marketable (Marasco et al., 2022).

Government support through policies that emphasise the importance of TVET and investment in infrastructure continue to create an environment conducive to career awareness. Dedicated career counselling services in TVET institutions, industry mentoring programs, and public awareness campaigns play an important role in dispelling stereotypes and showcasing the diverse and rewarding careers of TVET. By adapting to global and regional trends and showcasing success stories in the field of TVET, stakeholders can collectively contribute to changing perceptions and foster a well-informed workforce ready to meet evolving industry demands.

### 1.3 Tahfiz School Curriculum

Tahfiz School aims to ensure that students can read, understand, and memorize the Al-Quran in depth. They also teach Islamic values and ethics to students. Nowadays, there is a trend that Muslims are increasingly aware of the advantages, goodness, and honor of those who memorize the Al-Quran. This has also encouraged parents to enroll their children in tahfiz schools (Ulwan, 2015). For most people today, the tahfiz education system that combines the academic system and the religious system or memorizing the Quran is considered to be in line with global demand at this point. The titles "al-hafiz" for men and "al-hafizah" for women have a very high value, both in the view of Allah SWT and in the view of society today (Ismail, 2018).

Private tahfiz schools in Malaysia typically follow the boarding school model, where students live on campus and receive a holistic Islamic education. The schools are managed by certified Islamic scholars and administrators, ensuring the preservation of Islamic teachings and values. The curriculum for private Tahfiz schools revolves around memorizing and reciting the Quran. Students spend most of their time memorizing the

entire Quran and perfecting their reading skills. In addition to the study of the Quran, these schools also offer academic subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages to ensure a well-rounded education for their students. The tahfiz government school is a type of Islamic school that focuses on memorizing the Quran. These schools are usually funded by the government and are open to students of all ages. Various trends were also formed by implementing the integration between Naqli (religious knowledge) and Aqli (rational knowledge), especially the integration between fardu ain (individual obligatory knowledge) and fardu kifayah (collective obligatory knowledge). Fardu ain knowledge is related to religious knowledge such as tafsir, takwil, and hadith combined with fardu kifayah knowledge such as science, medicine, and mathematics. Maahad Tahfiz al-Qur'an wal Qiraat (MTAQ) in Kelantan is one of the early tahfiz institutions that implemented this trend of integration. The state government also started to follow this step, and the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) participated by creating a modern tahfiz school known as the Ulul Albab program in certain MARA Junior High Schools (MRSM) under its leadership (Hisham et al., 2014).

## 2. Methodology

Researchers have implemented quantitative methods using a survey design to study the level of awareness of the implementation of technical and vocational education among Tahfiz school students in the Selangor district. This study also uses a questionnaire survey tool as an instrument to enable descriptions to be made of the variables being studied. Before conducting the study, the study population needs to be identified. The population for a survey is a group of individuals who share one or more characteristics with the subject the researcher wants to study. Based on the scope of this study, the population includes only Tahfiz students in the Hulu Langat district.

This study uses a cluster sampling method. This method is used because the state of Selangor is a geographically large area. A sampling technique known as cluster sampling is the selection of groups or clusters that represent a defined population (Babbie, 2013). This method involves selecting several clusters as a sample, and information is collected from everyone in each cluster. When the population is large or is geographically large, cluster sampling is often used because it is more appropriate and economical (Babbie, 2013). The total sample used in this study is 144. The researcher took the total number of respondents through Cohen's (1992) sample size determination table method.

### 2.1 Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument to obtain and collect data. Closed-ended question items were used in the questionnaire. Respondents only need to answer according to their agreement. The content of the questionnaire is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Questionnaires Contents

Part	Element	Number Of Items
A	Respondent Demographic Data e.g -Gender - Age	2
B	Interest e.g- I am very interested in the field as offered in the field of TVET	15
C	Awareness of career opportunities e.g- My career opportunities become brighter if I have a skill certificate in the field of TVET	15

The three parts of the questionnaire are called parts A, B and C. The questions in Part A focus on the background and demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age and gender. Part B has 15 questions to measure the extent of Tahfiz students' interest in technical and vocational education. Next, section C also has 15, and all these questions are to assess the awareness of career opportunities in the field of TVET for Tahfiz students.

**Table 2** Pilot Study Statistical Analysis of Alpha Cronbach

Part	Element	Cronbach Alpha	Reliability Level
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B	Interest e.g- I am very interested in the field as offered in the field of TVET	0.88	Very good and effective with high level of consistency
C	Awareness of career opportunities e.g- My career opportunities become brighter if I have a skill certificate in the field of TVET	0.96	Very good and effective with high level of consistency

A pilot study involves a smaller sample size compared to the main study. According to Tan (2020) Cronbach's Alpha value should exceed 0.7 to determine the reliability of a questionnaire. A pilot study for this research was conducted on a sample of 30 Tahfiz students at Sungai Petani, Kedah. As stated by Issac and Michael (1995) the total sample size ranges from 10 to 30. This is because they have the same characteristics as the actual study that was conducted. The reliability analysis for the pilot test, the researcher found that all 30 items had Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the value 0.7. Therefore, the researcher kept all the total items for actual study.

### 3. Result and Discussions

The results of the study show the number of respondents according to gender as shown in Table 3. A total of 58 men and 86 women were involved in this study, all of whom were Tahfiz students in the Hulu Langat district. On average, the age of most respondents is 16-17 years old.

**Table 3** Number of respondents by gender

Gender	Frequency
Male	58
Female	86

The findings indicate that Tahfiz students perceived a high level of interest in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) field (M=3.48; SD=0.61), suggesting a strong inclination and desire for this domain. This aligns with the results reported by Chia Ming et al. (2022), who similarly observed a heightened interest among students in the TVET field. However, the study also highlights that students' study flow emerges as the most significant factor influencing their inclination towards the TVET field. In contrast, Azeem's study (2022) posits a lower interest among students in the TVET field. Notably, Azeem's research, conducted in urban areas, revealed a higher interest in the TVET program compared to students in rural areas. This underscores the influence of students' academic backgrounds and the subjects they pursue on their interest in the TVET program (Azeem et al., 2022).

**Table 4** Mean Value for the selected Items with Higher Mean

Part	Element	Mean, M	Std. Deviation, $\sigma$	Level
B	Interest e.g- I am very interested in the field as offered in field TVET	3.48	0.61	High
C	Awareness e.g- My career opportunities become brighter if I have a skill certificate in the field of TVET the	3.58	0.63	High

N:144 (1.00-1.80 Very Low, 1.81-2.60 Low, 2.61-3.40 Medium, 3.41-4.20 High, 4.21- 5.00 Very High)

The results of the study show that the awareness of Tahfiz school students around Hulu Langat is at a high level (M=3.58; SD=0.63). Based on the results of the study on the level of Tahfiz students' awareness of the field of Vocational and Technical Learning (TVET) that has been obtained before, these Tahfiz students show a positive awareness of this field. Questionnaire items in the study show that respondents collectively have a favorable awareness of TVET. The study also found that most students have a high level of career awareness in the field of PTV (Pajian 2018). This shows the importance of students' views and beliefs in career opportunities in the field of TVET. Another study conducted by Yakim Noor (2019) who said the level of awareness of the application of PTV among Tahfiz students is at a high level. According to him, aspects of personality and

character in career opportunities are important criteria in considering filling a position in an organization as well as confidence and self-appearance is also required.

**Table 4** Comparison of Male and Female Tahfiz Student on Interest and Awareness (n= 58 Males and 86 Female)

Element	Mean, M	Std. Deviation, $\sigma$	t	df	p	d
Interest			-1.497	142	0.14	0.26
Male	3.39	0.61				
Female	3.54	0.61				
Awareness			-0.476	142	0.64	0.08
Male	3.55	0.72				
Female	3.60	0.54				

The results of this study show that there is no significant difference in the level of interest of Tahfiz students for male and female students in the field of TVET. In line with the study conducted by Abu Bakar and Mahmud (2020) in Malaysia, it was found that there was no significant difference in career aspirations and interests between male and female students in the field of TVET. According to him, both male and female students in Malaysia have the same level of interest and aspirations in the field of TVET and this may be due to the efforts made by the education system in Malaysia which encourages students, regardless of gender, to pursue a career in the field of TVET. After all, the findings from this study show that there is no significant difference in the level of awareness of Tahfiz students' career opportunities for men and women in the field of TVET. In line with the findings of a study conducted by Tan Tai and Kamin (2014) which shows that there is no significant difference in the awareness of career opportunities for gender because it is concluded that the level of career awareness is not influenced by gender and race factors in career selection. On the other hand, according to a study conducted by Smith and Johnson (2020), gender differences in the awareness of career opportunities in the context of TVET, it was found that societal stereotypes play an important role in influencing the career choices of male and female students, with men more inclined towards fields related to TVET while women face obstacles in pursuing a male-dominated vocational career (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusion and Implication

The study concludes that Tahfiz pupils have a strong interest in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is consistent with earlier research findings by Wan Muda (2021). They continue to have a favorable awareness of employment options in the TVET industry. Different studies, however, have differing views; some claim high levels of curiosity, while others find lower levels. Even though Tahfiz students are very interested in TVET, their choice of academic tracks is seen as a deciding element in their decision to pursue this subject. This emphasizes how carefully the TVET curriculum should be included in Tahfiz institutions to potentially increase interest in TVET and support the nation's economic growth (Paryono, 2017).

According to the survey, Tahfiz students have a good awareness of career choices in TVET and a positive perception of the relationship between having a skill certificate and future employment opportunities. Their job goals are influenced by this awareness, especially when it comes to vocational education. This aligns with the opinions of Yakim and Labor (2019). It's important to take note of the differences in study results between male and female Tahfiz students' awareness and interest in TVET. While some research finds no discernible differences, others recognize considerable variances driven by gender stereotypes and cultural variables.

The study's conclusions have significant ramifications. First, according to the survey, ahfiz students are more aware of employment options in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). Their favorable perception of the relationship between skill certifications and employment opportunities suggests a knowledgeable outlook that can greatly impact their professional goals, particularly in the field of vocational education (Abidemi & Marievincent, 2023).

Nonetheless, the study emphasizes how crucial it is to consider gender-specific differences in the outcomes. There are notable discrepancies between male and female Tahfiz students' interest and awareness of TVET, according to some research, while others find no discernible distinctions. These discrepancies are explained by

gender stereotypes and societal influences that influence students' attitudes and decisions about vocational education. This implies that to promote TVET among Tahfiz students, educational officials, and practitioners should take a sophisticated approach that takes cultural influences and gender-specific factors into account. The varied needs and goals of male and female Tahfiz students in the TVET area can be better met by educational efforts that acknowledge and address these differences.

## Acknowledgment

Author would like to thank the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and to those who involve in this study especially the Tahfiz schools for their great cooperation.

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